READING AS A FINE ART

LEGOUVÉ

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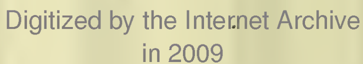
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Reading as a Fine Art

Suggestions to those who would easily acquire a rare and charming accomplishment

by ERNEST LEGOUVÉ

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TO THE SCHOLARS

OF

THE HIGH AND NORMAL SCHOOL.

For you this sketch was written: permit me to dedicate it to you; in fact, to intrust it to your care. Pupils to-day, to-morrow you will be teachers; to-morrow, generation after generation of youth will pass through your guardian hands. An idea received by you, must of necessity reach thousands of minds. Help me, then, to spread abroad the work in which you have some share, and allow me to add to the great pleasure of having numbered you among my hearers the still greater happiness of calling you my assistants.

E. LEGOUVÉ.

Paris, April, 1877.

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READING AS A FINE ART.

PART FIRST.

CHAPTER I.

FIRST STEPS. — HOW I LEARNED TO READ.

NOTHING is small in the great matter of education; and secondary as the question we are to treat may be, it is important, from the simple fact that it points to progress to be made in the art of instruction. In America, reading aloud is considered one of the chief studies in public schools, — one of the bases of primary education. In France, it is not even reckoned an accomplishment; it is regarded as something strange and unnecessary, almost as an affectation. I desire to contest this prejudice, and to contribute my mite towards introducing the art of reading into our customs and the list of school duties.

In the first place, is reading an art? Many doubt

it; some deny it. For myself, thirty years of study and experience have convinced me that it is an art as difficult as it is substantial, as useful as it is difficult of attainment; and this I hope to prove logically, but without becoming wearisome. Let me choose my own way to reach this end, and tell you the story of my own progress.

I was always extremely fond of reading aloud, this being an inherited taste; for my father was esteemed one of the most famous readers, I may say, one of the best teachers of his day. When Mlle. Duchesnois made her début, the programme read: "Mlle. Duchesnois, pupil of M. Legouvé." Does not this prove that elocution and the theatre were more highly valued, if not more honored, then than now? What member of the Academy would venture now to join his name on a play-bill with that of an actress? I, of course, am out of the question; for the love of elocution was born and bred in me, with a fellow-feeling for the actor, for which I have often been blamed, but which I hope I shall never outlive. As a boy at school, I organized a little troop of actors of my own age, who spent their vacation-hours in reciting whole acts of Racine, Corneille, and Molière to family and friends. All parts seemed good to me, — kings, lovers, servants,

and noble fathers; nothing staggered my youthful ardor. I even played the tragedy queen, on occasion, in imitation of antiquity. Of course, it was rough, unequal, stagey, and bombastic; my voice was often hoarse: but beneath all the froth and fustian lurked some grains of truth and feeling, which kept my heart warm with the wholesome fever of admiration.

On leaving school, a happy accident introduced me to a fine teacher of elocution.

I was to read one of my first poetical efforts, "The Two Mothers," at the Conservatory, before the Philotechnic Society. On reciting it to my master, M. Bouilly, he exclaimed: "My boy, you don't set off your wares for what they're worth! Go ask my friend, M. Febvé, to give you a few lessons." These lessons opened my eyes: they taught what I never dreamed, that elocution has its grammar; and M. Febvé also gave me a most useful bit of advice. "The Conservatory Hall," said he, "is like a good Stradivarius: no violin is more sweetly resonant; the sounds that you confide to those melodious walls will return to you fuller and more mellow than ever; the voice plays upon them as the fingers on an instrument. Be careful not to raise your voice too much; and remember one im-

portant rule: the voice should always be adapted and proportioned, not only to the size, but to the acoustic qualities of the hall spoken in."

My next teacher was — my profession. Being a dramatist, I was thrown constantly with that class of artists whose first condition of success is fine elocution, — namely, actors. My successive plays showed me the method of work of the most famous tragedians and comedians of the day, — Samson, Régnier, Delaunay, and Got. I questioned them, studied them, and worked with them. From them I learned the amount of time and trouble required for the mastery of the voice; they showed me the calculation, close reasoning, and skill requisite to choose between one inflection, one accent, and another; and lastly, a lucky chance brought me into active communion with the three brightest theatrical stars of the past forty years, — Mlle. Mars, Mlle. Rachel, and Mme. Ristori.

"Louise de Lignerolles," my first play, and one of Mlle. Mars's final creations, required no less than sixty-eight rehearsals; which proved a profitable, though a severe school to me, for Mlle. Mars's powers of mimicry served her mocking spirit wondrous well. Although I had some good points as reader and speaker, I had but little experience, and, like

all young men, was given to exaggeration; but, whenever my directions to the actors became in the least declamatory or bombastic, Mars would imitate me with a grain of caricature that made me ridiculous. I bit my lip with rage, but was silent, accepting the hint and striving to profit by it.

She once gave me a fine lesson. Coming to rehearsal, tired, out of sorts, and ill-disposed to forget herself in her part, she found us at the second act, which contains one scene requiring great action and energy. She went through it in an undertone, almost without a motion; still, every effect, every shade of meaning, was expressed and plainly visible. It was like a picture seen from a distance, or a strain of music heard from afar. This was a revelation to me. I now understood the firm basis upon which the art of delivery must rest, when a great artist could thus extinguish her own personality, if I may so express it, without destroying proportions, harmony, or general effect.

The name of Rachel will always be connected to me with a memorable morning which we spent together. The point in question was a certain scene in "Louise de Lignerolles," which Rachel was to play after Mars had done so. It does not contain

more than thirty lines, which thirty lines Mlle. Rachel and I studied for three long hours; and never before did that admirable artist's power of attention, subtle spirit, and true modesty so astound and instruct me. What a lesson it was to us both! With what ardor we buckled to the task! She was determined to outdo her immortal predecessor. Not one of the three or four hundred words composing the scene but was turned and twisted in every possible way, to discover the truest and most effective rendering. Three such hours were worth months of study.

Next, chance advanced me yet farther in this department of art.

My tragedy of "Medea" having brought me into relations with Ristori, our common success soon made us friends. Accordingly, when M. Edouard Thierry, the skilful manager of the Théâtre Français, on the occasion of a benefit for Racine's granddaughter, desired to use Ristori's name on the bill, he came to me to write something *in French and in prose*, to be translated into Italian verse for her. I set to work; but my ideas flowed in poetic measure, and, hastening to Mme. Ristori, I told her of Thierry's desire, which she eagerly seconded, and handed her my manuscript, saying, —

"Read that."

"What! French poetry?"

"Yes."

"Aloud?"

"Yes."

"But why?"

"Because that is what I intend you to recite."

"On the stage?" she cried, rising hastily. "On the stage? French poetry? Then you are my deadly enemy! You want me to be hissed!"

"Wait a bit, my friend! if you are hissed, I shall share your fate. So our interests are alike. Sit down, and read that to me."

My quiet manner pacified her, although she shook her fist at me; but she began, and read to the end.

"Well?" said she.

"Well! read it once more; I'm not quite sure about it yet."

This done, I exclaimed, —

"*There's something in it!* we must set to work!"

Next day I took M. Régnier to hear her, unwilling to trust to my own impressions only. The day after, I took M. Samson; and a week later, she recited the lines at the Théâtre Français so delightfully, that M. Samson, standing by, did not hesitate

to say to two young actresses, his pupils: "Young ladies, take a lesson!"

Was her Italian accent entirely gone? By no means; but talent is a kindly mantle, and her success was such that I attempted a French play for her, entitled, "Beatrice; or, the Madonna of Art." This was a dangerous task, and I ran the greatest of all risks, — the risk of ridicule. But I knew her, and could count upon her. My play written, I joined her at Florence, where for one month I went over her part with her, line by line, word by word, syllable by syllable. This was my method: There are two great distinctions between French and Italian pronunciation; the first relating to the accent, the second to the sound itself of the vowels. The Italians have no *e* mute, they pronounce the French *u* OU; the French diphthong *eu* is a dead letter to them. Moreover, the French *a*, *o*, and particularly the French *e* have medium sounds not marked by the accents, grave, acute, or circumflex. How explain to a foreigner that the *e* in *cette*, for instance, is neither as open as in *tête*, as clear as in *colère*, nor as sharp as in *bétail?*

The accent is yet more difficult of comprehension, for the Italian language is very rich in accent; French, very poor. The French glide over the syl-

lables, merely emphasizing the last. The Italians, on the contrary, consider the accent — its due weight and place — among the chief beauties of their language. How was I to rid my spokeswoman of this feeling? How accustom her, for instance, to run lightly over the first three syllables of *Semiramis*, pausing only on the last, when the Italian *Semiramide* requires such stress on the *ra?*

After much thought, I had the part of Beatrice written out in a very big black hand, the lines widely spaced. Then I covered the pages with three sorts of signs in red ink: — | ⌢

The horizontal lines were to blot out every *e* mute, a letter not pronounced in French, but which an Italian is always tempted to use. So I wrote: "Madame, faites moi le plaisir." The perpendicular lines, placed over vowels whose medium sound is unknown in Italy, recalled to the artist's eye the special intonation which I had taught her ears and lips. The curved lines, starting from the first syllable and falling on the final one, said to her: "On, on, no stopping midway!" Her Italian instinct was constantly leading her to linger on one part or other of the word . . . but there was the immovable red line! . . . In this way, — thanks to this system of musical notation, thanks to weeks of

work, but above all, thanks to the wonderful intellect and yet more wonderful power of will of this artist, — we succeeded, not in removing her accent (that I neither hoped nor attempted), but in leaving nothing but the flavor of the fruit; just enough to be striking without being strange, interesting without being ridiculous.

Here, you see, I passed from the rôle of scholar to that of master, which was but another method of learning: for there is no better way to learn than to teach; and every dramatist must needs turn elocution-teacher. Our mouth-pieces are often beginners, with nothing but a pretty face or sweet voice to recommend them: still, they are so exactly the person of our play that we would not exchange them, and needs must turn us to the task of breathing a soul into the fair statue. But the last and worst trial of all is the day when the author reads his piece to the managers and company, — a task as important as it is hard. The fate of his play is in his own hands, I might say in his voice. It is nothing more nor less than a first performance, without costume, scenery, or actors, — one person playing every part; and between reading and acting a play lies a vast difference. The actor has but one part to fill; the reader, all. The actor is a soloist in the orchestra:

the reader, the whole orchestra. I know no more difficult task, no more invigorating system of gymnastics. And if to this, forty years of incessant collaboration with the most distinguished actors are added, it is plain that I have a right to call myself the pupil of the Théâtre Français.

Lastly, my third master was the College of France, where, in 1848 and 1866, I delivered a course of lectures on the "Moral History of Woman," and on "Parents and Children in the Nineteenth Century." Brought for the first time into direct and constant communication with the public, I learned the rules imposed and the resources furnished by a large audience. Here I finished my education; not that I was or am a master of the art of reading, — I have known too many true artists to arrogate that name to myself, — but I passed my examination, and was licensed to practise. It then occurred to me to collect these scattered observations, and I hastened to confide my plan to a friend.

CHAPTER II.

SHOULD WE READ AS WE TALK?

In the spring of 1868, there lived not far from me a man of whom I might say, as Mme. de Sévigné said of Montaigne: "What a country neighbor he would make!" M. St. Marc Girardin, — for of him I speak, — though of a sceptical turn, was the warmest of friends, best of advisers, and most delightful of talkers. To him I submitted my idea, and, after hearing me attentively, he said: "My friend, you may execute brilliant variations and bravuras on your theme, which will call down hearty applause; but teach a lesson, never! Reading is not an art; it is the natural exercise of a natural power. There are people who read well, and people who read ill; but the former's talent is a gift, a charm, a grace, what you will, but not an acquired art. It is not to be taught. The exercise of this natural power may call for certain useful sugges-

tions: **Hygienic rules,** such as, 'Do not talk or read to excess, any more than you would walk or eat to excess.' Common-sense rules, such as, 'Do not read too loud or too fast.' Rules of good taste, such as, 'Strive to understand, and to make your hearers understand, what you read.' But beyond these brief instructions, there are no direct rules for reading, such as constitute an art. The art of reading is summed up in a single sentence: 'Read as you talk.'"

I had great faith in M. Girardin's taste, and knew his perfect sincerity; but here I had my own convictions, and perceived the feeling underlying his words, perhaps unconsciously to himself: "I, St. Marc Girardin, read very well, and I never was taught; therefore, no one requires teaching."

Accordingly, I replied: "My dear friend, there is a grain of truth in what you say, as there always is in the words of a clever man of the world, who talks of a subject which he has not studied."

This rather provoked him; but I continued calmly: "Undoubtedly, much depends in reading upon natural talent. It is not like many other arts and trades, absolutely forbidden to those who have not served an apprenticeship. Some men

read gracefully and pleasantly without study. You are an example of this, for you read *effectively;* you are always applauded: but you do not read — excuse my frankness — you do not read well."

Upon this he smiled slyly, and said: "What! I don't read well?"

"No! and the proof of it is that, if any one else read as you do, he would read very badly."

"Explain yourself," he exclaimed, laughing

"Nothing easier. I have heard you read extracts from Lamartine, Corneille, and Victor Hugo, in your lectures at the Sorbonne; and I 've heard you read your own essays at the Academy. The difference was immense."

"In what way?"

"The verses of the great masters, read by you, were much applauded. Why? Because you brought all your intellect and superior mind to bear on the reading; because you have a ringing voice and an air of conviction, — all personal qualities which hide your faults."

"Well, what are my faults, if you please?"

"Your voice has certain tones which offend by their very excess. Your delivery is often somewhat declamatory and bombastic, — a failing not

displeasing to your youthful listeners. But change the audience, and give your manner to some one without your intellect and authority, and he would not please, just because he imitated you too well. Now nothing is good which may not safely be copied. Therefore, you read with talent, but not as one knowing how to read — even your own addresses, which no one else could read as well as you do, for there your faults become good points, being a part of your personality. Let me illustrate my meaning. Jules Sandeau wrote a charming speech in answer to Camille Doucet, which he begged me to read for him. 'Heaven forbid!' said I.

"Why? You would read it much better than I."

"Yes! *but I should not read it so well.* Your speech is a part of yourself. To be sure, I should not make the same mistakes that you would. I should not drop my last syllables, I should make more of the witticisms; but I should not have your easy attitude, your indolent voice, your indifferent manner, — all which are charming in you, because natural, but which would be disagreeable in me, because acquired. Your speech is fat and fair; I should read it like a thin, dark-haired man: read it yourself."

"He took my advice, and his success proved me right. But had he read another man's production thus, it would have been sheer treason."

"A pretty story," said St. Marc Girardin, "but I don't see what it leads us to. I understand your tale, but don't see what moral you want to draw from it."

"Another example may help you. M. Viennet had great fame as a reader, — well deserved when he read his own verses. His hoarse voice, queer gestures, little tuft of hair standing erect like a cock's comb, his jolly intonation, were the exact picture of his style of talent, vivid and somewhat vulgar as it was; add to this, that he had an immense admiration for every thing that was his own, which gave his delivery of his own verses a spirit and fire that warmed his audience. I was once asked to read a poem by M. Viennet at the Academy, and refused, saying that neither the piece nor myself could succeed, as I lacked the chief element of M. Viennet's success, — a profound conviction that what I read was a masterpiece of art!"

This harmless little epigram amused St. Marc Girardin, and he cried gayly: "The conclusion! the conclusion! What do you conclude from that?"

"I conclude that we should never say a writer reads well because he is applauded for reading his own writings, his very faults often helping his success. I conclude that we must except certain rare spirits, certain exceptional natures like your own, who can dispense with rules, they evade them so gracefully! Art is not for you; you need it not! But I also conclude that the majority of mankind require to be taught to read, and that this knowledge, which may be useful even to superior beings, — for one may have more science without having less talent, — is indispensable to others."

"But what does this science consist of? How do you define it?"

"The art of speaking and reading correctly."

"Correctness presupposes rules. What are these rules?"

"They are of two sorts, material and intellectual; for the art of reading depends at the same time upon the exercise of a physical organ, the voice, and of a spiritual organ, the intellect. Shall we take up the voice first?"

"With all my heart," said St. Marc Girardin.

"Then I will write down the results of my observation; for in such a matter we must be exact."

But, alas! The war broke out; I wrote nothing,

until three months ago, when, at the request of M. Bersot, — a man who does honor to the cause of public education, — I made this epitome of my experience for the pupils of the High and Normal School.

CHAPTER III.

TECHNICAL PART OF THE ART OF READING.— THE VOICE.

THE technical part of the art of reading is devoted to two objects, — the voice and the pronunciation; sounds and words.

The vocal apparatus resembles the optic and auric apparatus, differing from them in one essential point; *i. e.*, sight and hearing are involuntary. No sooner are our eyes open and there is light, or our ears open and there is a noise, than we see and hear, whether we wish to do so or not. The voice on the contrary is under the control of the will; man speaks only when he chooses.

There is a second difference: we cannot see or hear more or less at pleasure, except by interposing some veil or obstacle between the external world and ourselves. But not so with the voice; we speak fast or slow, loud or low; we regulate the measure of vocal action as well as the action itself.

Hence, the natural inference is that we cannot be taught to hear or see (I refer to mere material action), and that consequently there is no art of seeing or hearing; while we may learn to talk, language being susceptible to changes resulting from the will.

One word will suffice to explain this difference.

The vocal apparatus is not only an *apparatus*, it is an *instrument*, like a piano. Now what is the characteristic feature of the piano? The key-board is composed of from six and a half to seven octaves, divided into three classes of notes, — upper, lower, and middle, — whose tones correspond to strings of various sizes. The voice has its key-board also, divided into two octaves instead of seven, but having its three species of notes like the piano, and its chords of differing size; and we can never play upon the voice properly without study, any more than we can on the piano.

Let me go even farther. On leaving the hands of a good maker, the piano is a complete and perfect instrument, the sound issuing from it as musical as it is harmonious, when called forth by an artist's fingers. But the little piano given us at birth seldom reaches such perfection. There are missing chords, squeaky keys, false notes; so that

before we can become good pianists we must turn makers and tuners, and set our instruments in order.

The three varieties of voice, known as high, low, and medium, are all indispensable to artistic reading; but they should be very differently used, their strength being quite unequal. The medium voice is the strongest, most flexible, and natural of the three; indeed, the famous actor Molé once said, "Without the middle register, no reputation." In fact, the medium voice, being the ordinary one, is used to express all the truest and most natural emotions: the lower notes often have great power, the upper notes great brilliancy; but they should never be used unseasonably. I might compare the upper notes to the cavalry in an army, to be reserved for sudden, bold attacks, triumphant charges; the lower notes, like the artillery, are used for feats of strength; but the true dependence of the army, the element on which the tactician chiefly relies, is the infantry, — the medium tones. The first rule in the art of reading establishes the superior value of the middle register. The upper tones are much more fragile, are liable to wear out, or become shrill and discordant if too much used. Sometimes this abuse of the upper notes affects

the very judgment of a speaker. M. Berryer once told me how he lost an excellent case by unconsciously beginning his plea on too high a key. Fatigue soon spread from his larynx to his head, his thoughts became involved, and he lost a part of his brain power, simply because it never occurred to him to descend from the lofty perch to which his voice had climbed at the outset.

Nor is abuse of the lower notes less serious; it produces monotony and a certain dulness and deadness of quality. Talma, when young, was much given to this failing. His voice, though powerful and eloquent, was rather sombre; and it was only by dint of hard study that he raised it from the depths where it naturally lingered. *Apropos* of this, let me relate an anecdote of my father, who, as I said before, was a fine reader, — much of his success at the College of France, where he taught, depending on this talent. He often introduced quotations from the great poets of France in his lectures, which won universal applause. This applause, to which he was naturally susceptible, gained him many envious foes, and at last a criticism appeared, as follows: "Yesterday, M. Legouvé read two scenes from Racine in his sepulchral voice." This fell under the notice of one of his friends, M.

Parseval Grandmaison, who immediately said: "Dear me, Legouvé must be very much vexed at this; I'll go to see him." He found my father on the sofa in a most melancholy mood.

"Oh! it's you, is it, my dear Parseval?"

"Yes. Are you ill, Legouvé? You look sad."

"No! there's nothing the matter; a slight sore throat. Tell me, Parseval, what do you think of my voice?"

"Why, I think it's beautiful, my boy."

"Yes, yes; but what do you consider its character? Do you call it a brilliant voice?"

"Oh, no! no! not brilliant! I should rather call it sonorous; yes, that's it, sonorous."

"Perhaps it would be better to call it a grave voice?"

"Grave be it! but not melancholy! No! no! not melancholy! And yet there is a certain —"

"But you don't call it cavernous?"

"Not at all! Still —"

"Oh! I see," cried my father, "that you agree with that wretched critic, who calls my voice sepulchral!"

The moral of this story is, that from that day forth my father strove to give his lower notes a rest, and to blend them better with the upper and

medium tones; and thus he acquired that variety of sound which is at once charming to the listener, and easy for the reader.

But this intermixture of tone is not the only vocal exercise. The voice must be cultivated in various ways. Cultivation strengthens a weak voice, makes a stiff one flexible, a harsh one soft, and in fact acts upon the speaking voice as musical exercises on the singing voice. We sometimes hear that great artists — M. Duprez, for instance — *made their own voices*. The expression is incorrect. No one can make a voice who has not one to start with, and this is proved by the fact that the voice is perishable. No voice would ever be lost, could it be made at will; but it may be changed; it may gain body, brilliancy, and expression, not only from a series of gymnastics adapted to strengthen the whole organ, but from a certain method of attacking the note. Additional notes may also be gained by study. On one occasion, the famous Malibran, when singing the rondo from "Somnambula," finished her cadenza with a trill on *d* in alt, running up from low *d*, thus embracing three octaves. These three octaves were no natural gift, but the result of long and patient labor. After the concert, some one expressed his admiration of her *d* in alt, to which

she replied: "Well, I've worked hard enough for it. I've been chasing it for a month. I pursued it everywhere, — when I was dressing, when I was doing my hair; and at last I found it in the toe of a shoe that I was putting on!" Thus we see that art will not only aid us in governing, but also in extending our kingdom.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ART OF BREATHING.

THE second great lesson in learning to read is how to breathe. Many may think that if there be a natural and instinctive action upon earth with which art has nothing to do, it is the act of taking breath. To breathe is to live, and we breathe unconsciously as we live; and yet no one can read well without breathing properly, and no one can breathe properly without study: indeed, it is one of the rarest accomplishments in a reader. Let me explain myself. When we breathe in every-day life, the air enters and leaves the lungs like a stream flowing continuously, insensibly, and equably. But this gentle passage of the air through the throat does not suffice to set the vocal chords in vibration, and they are mute like the keys of an untouched piano: the air must strike them a sharp blow before they will resound, as the fingers strike the

keys of the piano. Some of my readers may have heard an Æolian harp: it stood in a doorway or window; if there was no air it was silent; but let the air be condensed into wind, and the strings wake to music. A similar phenomenon occurs every time that we speak. We condense and compress the air contained in the lungs, force it into the throat, and this shock produces speech. But this requires more air than the ordinary act of breathing, and we can no longer use the simile of a flowing stream: we must compare the breath to water gushing from a pump, spurting out faster and faster at every stroke of the handle. The usual conditions of breathing are now set aside. The scant supply of air stored away for ordinary breath-taking is insufficient for the energetic act of speech: a balance must be struck between what we *have* and what we *should have.* We must go to headquarters, to the atmosphere itself, and demand the necessary amount of air. This demand is called inhalation; the act of breathing being divided into two parts, — inhalation and expiration. To inhale is to gain a supply for future need; to exhale, to expend that provision.

Each of these is an act in itself. The act of inhalation consists in drawing breath from the very

base of the lungs, from the diaphragm ; for if we breathe from the upper part of the lungs only, we obtain too small a supply of air, which is soon exhausted, and if we have a lengthy passage to read we are in the condition of a traveller in the desert who starts with his water-skins but half full, — breath fails us ; we are obliged to pause and take in a fresh stock, which is fatiguing both to ourselves and to others, as we shall presently see. The first duty of the reader, who is to fill a long programme, is to take a deep breath at the start, to be sure that his lungs are well furnished. Then comes the second and most difficult part, — expenditure of this breath. A bad reader does not take breath often enough, and spends it too freely ; he throws this precious treasure out of the window, as it were, squandering it as a spendthrift his gold. The result is that the speaker, reader, actor, or singer, as the case may be, is continually at the pump, giving sudden gasps, which are most disagreeable to his audience. An accomplished singer of my acquaintance had this failing ; he was constantly taking breath, and the bellows-like sound mingled with his singing was unendurable. He finally perceived and corrected his mistake, proving that it may be cured. M. Stockhausen, an eminent

artist, astonished all the Swiss guides by never losing breath in climbing the steepest mountains. "My secret is a simple one," said he; "I understand the art of breathing." The great singer, Rubini, was a thorough master of the art. No one ever heard him breathe. The following anecdote of Talma may serve to explain this seeming mystery.

While a young man, Talma played Diderot's "Père de Famille," and on reaching the famous speech, "Fifteen hundred pounds a year and my Sophy," he burst out, stormed, raged, and finally hurrying behind the scenes in a state of complete exhaustion, sank against the wall, panting like an ox.

"Fool!" said Molé, who was standing by, "and you pretend to play tragedy! Come to me tomorrow, and I'll teach you how to be impassioned without getting out of breath."

Talma went; but whether the master lacked patience or the pupil docility, the lesson did him little good. At that time there was an actor at the theatre named Dorival; thin, ugly, and weak-voiced, he was nevertheless quite successful as a tragedian. "How does that fellow manage?" thought Talma. "I am ten times as strong, and yet I fatigue myself ten times more. I must ask him his secret."

Dorival baffled his querist by this bitter-sweet reply, which has a smack of envy in it: "Oh! you are so successful, M. Talma, that you need no lessons."

"I 'll make you give me one, though," muttered Talma; and the next time that Dorival played Châtillon in "Zaïre," the young man hid himself — guess where! in the prompter's box, where he could hear and see without being seen. There he watched and studied to such good purpose, that, after the great speech in the second act, he left his post, exclaiming, "I 've got it! *I've hit it!*" He saw that Dorival's whole art lay in his genius for breathing, which led him always to take breath before his lungs were quite empty; and, to conceal this repeated inhalation from the public, he strove to place it before *a*, *e*, or *o*, — that is, at places where, his mouth being already open, he could breathe lightly and imperceptibly.

We see what an immense part the breath has to play in elocutionary art; its rules are the only inviolable ones. An actor launched on a stormy passage, carried away by passion, may forget the laws of punctuation, confound commas and periods, and hasten headlong to the conclusion of his phrase; but he must always be master of his breath, even

when he seems to lose it; an accomplished actor is never out of breath except in appearance and for effect.

Talma reduced these rules to a striking maxim: The artist who tires himself is no genius."

I hear my reader's objection: "This art may be very useful to an actor; but we are talking of reading, not the theatre." Yes, but the reader needs it yet more than the actor; for, long and important as the latter's part may be, he always has times of forced rest. He is silent when others speak; and his very gestures, added to his words, help to make them true and touching. But the reader often goes on for an hour without pause, the immobility of his body obliging him to draw all his power from his will alone. Consider, therefore, whether it is useless for him to understand the management of that precious breath which alone can carry him triumphantly and untired to the end.

Here is a curious example of the science of economy applied to the breath. Take a lighted candle, stand in front of it, and sing *a:* the light will scarcely flicker; but, instead of a single tone, sing a scale, and you will see the candle quiver at every note. The singer, Delle Sedie, runs up and down the scale before a flame, and it never wavers. This

is because he permits only the exact amount of breath to escape which is requisite to force the sound straight forward; and the air, being thus occupied in the emission of the note, loses its quality of wind, and is reduced to its quality of sound. You or I, on the contrary, waste a great deal of breath, and send the sound right and left, as well as forward. From this elocutionary rule we may deduce a moral lesson: In every act of life, spend no more than the exact amount of energy required! Every mental emotion is a jewel. Let us hoard them up for fitting use. How many people waste, in impatience and petty strife, the treasure of anger, so sacred when it becomes righteous wrath!

Now, for a few final and most necessary suggestions to readers. To breathe easily, choose a high seat. Buried in an easy-chair, it is impossible to breathe from the base of the lungs. I would also say, Be careful to sit erect. No one who stoops can breathe otherwise than ill. Lastly, if possible, have a support for your back. Often, when reading in public, I have checked incipient vocal and cerebral fatigue simply by leaning well back in my chair. The moment that equilibrium was restored, I breathed freely, and my head grew clear.

CHAPTER V.

PRONUNCIATION.

We now pass from the world of sounds to the world of words; we stopped at vowels, and will now add to them consonants, which are the true framework of the word: a word may be reconstructed from its consonants as Cuvier reconstructed an unknown animal from its bones. The union of vowels and consonants constitutes pronunciation, for no consonant can be pronounced without the addition of a vowel; and the vowel by itself forms a sound which may be uttered, but not a distinct word. Clear speech, correct diction, the very life of language, depend upon good pronunciation; so that it is most important to study and attain it. All who read in public should strive to give each vowel its appropriate accent and emphasis, for otherwise the effect of the best sentence ever penned may be lost.

In regard to consonants, the science cf pronunciation is the science of articulation, the most difficult and most useful art imaginable. Few people are born with perfect articulation; in some it is harsh, in others lisping, in others thick and indistinct. Practice, constant and systematic practice, is the only remedy for these defects. Let me give you a simple but excellent exercise, which every one can try, and which is the result of observation. Suppose that you have a weighty secret to confide to a friend, but you are afraid of being overheard, as the door is open into the next room, where people are sitting. Do you go close up to your friend and whisper in his ear? No; you dare not, lest you be surprised in that suspicious attitude. What then will you do? Let me quote the words of that king of teachers, Régr.ier. You take your stand directly opposite your friend, and as softly as possible, speaking in an undertone, you trust to distinctness of articulation to convey the words to his eye as well as to his ear, for he watches as well as listens to you. Articulation thus does double duty; it plays the part of sound itself, and is accordingly obliged to sketch out the words accurately, and to emphasize each syllable, that it may penetrate the mind of the hearer. This is an infal-

lible cure for faulty or harsh enunciation. Practise this exercise for a few months, and your vocal gymnastics will make the articulatory muscles so strong and supple that they will respond to every turn of thought. Moreover, this method of M. Régnier has been adopted for teaching deaf mutes to *speak*. The teacher sketches the words on his lips; no sound, no voice! nothing but articulation: *the deaf man reads from his master's lips!*

Articulation plays an immense part in the domain of reading. Articulation, and articulation alone, gives clearness, energy, passion, and force. Such is its power that it can even overcome deficiency of voice in the presence of a large audience. There have been actors of the foremost rank, who had scarcely any voice. Potier had no voice. Monvel, the famous Monvel, not only had no voice, he had no teeth! And yet no one ever lost a word that fell from his lips; and never was there a more delightful, more moving artist than he, thanks to his perfect articulation. The best reader I ever knew was M. Andrieux, whose voice was not only weak, but worn, hoarse, and croaking. Yet his perfect enunciation triumphed over all these defects.

Sometimes a lucky hoarseness teaches an actor

the varied resources of articulation. M. Bouffé was once playing one of his great parts, — Father Grandet in "The Miser's Daughter," — and on reaching the most affecting scene in the play, where the old miser finds that he has been robbed, the actor began to shriek and rant as usual; but in a few moments the sound died on his lips, and he was compelled to finish in a low voice! The result was that he was a thousand times more natural and more touching, because he was forced to make up for lack of sound by distinct articulation. No one can speak without a voice; but the voice alone is so far from being enough for oratory, that there are readers, speakers, and actors, whose very wealth of voice is an embarrassment to them. They cannot enunciate; sound swallows up their words, vowels devour consonants, and they talk and read so loud, make so much noise about it, that no one can hear them. Sometimes, too, fashion forbids distinct articulation, and it becomes pedantic. An old frequenter of the Théâtre-Français tells me that during the last sixty years fashionable pronunciation has been changed three times. To serious-minded men, however, there is but one true fashion, namely, to pronounce distinctly enough to be understood, but not so much so as to be remarked.

CHAPTER VI.

STUTTERING.

STUTTERING is an especial evil, obstinate of cure, and appertaining to both mind and body. When due solely to physical malformation, it naturally comes within the province of medicine; when resulting from intellectual causes, it enters into the field of the elocutionist. The tongue often stammers, and stammers habitually, because the mind stammers; because the character stammers; because the person is never quite sure of what he wants to do or say; because he is timid, choleric, or hasty. Impatience, timidity, and lack of mental precision are the chief causes of that species of stuttering which is susceptible of cure: let the victim accustom himself to speak slowly, to be master of himself and his ideas, and he will cease to stammer. A distinguished singer of my acquaintance stammers slightly when he talks, but never when he sings. Why is this? Because, when he sings, he is sure

of his ground ; exercise, practice, and habit have made him master of his voice and diction so soon as he joins words to music ; but let him speak, and his natural timidity makes his tongue hesitating and uncertain. The artist vanishes, the man remains, and the stammerer reappears.

Physical stuttering, dependent on the organs of speech only, can be cured by medical aid alone.

It generally affects all letters impartially, though sometimes a stutterer has special enemies in the alphabet ; that is to say, there are certain letters before which he always hesitates, as a horse pauses before certain obstacles. I can cite a curious fact illustrative of this point. Twenty years ago, M. Scribe and I wrote a play called "Fairy Fingers," in which there was one part written for a stammerer. The character was meant to be funny, but not ridiculous ; and I even desired it to be touching. M. Got gladly accepted the part ; but, when he came to study it, found himself much puzzled to know how to make it interesting and affecting without ceasing to be funny. At last, he came running in to rehearsal with a radiant face. He hurried up to me, exclaiming : "I 've hit the secret ! I shall stutter only over two consonants, *p* and *d*. Thanks to this plan, suggested by my recent study of stam-

mering, I shall prevent the part from being monotonous, rid myself of the insufferable bore of stuttering all the time, and only keep just enough of the trick to be interesting and piquant. But," he added merrily, "it will make more work for you, my dear author; you will have to add a few more *p's* and *d's* to my part. I'll mark the places where I want them." This was done, and his success was fully equal to his expectations.

I doubt if organic stammering be curable. Physicians have made many attempts; I never saw a complete success. Temporary alleviation, or cessation, apparent cures? — yes! but a real cure? — never! Certain specialists advertise the number of their marvellous cures, but a scene which I once witnessed makes me rather incredulous in regard to reformed stutterers. I once went to a ball given by a doctor famed for this very specialty, who has done noble service for the art of speech by his theoretical labors.

"Sir," said I to a gentleman standing by, "will you be my *vis-à-vis* in the next dance?"

"Cer-cer-certainly."

"Oh! he stutters," thought I.

Refreshments were soon passed, and I said to another young man, "Please hand me an ice."

"Wi-wi-wi-th pl-pl-easure."

"Ah! he stammers, too!"

I turned and saw an old school-friend, who exclaimed: "Hullo! is it you? Don't you re-re-re-remember how I used to st-st-st-stutter at school?"

"Yes."

"Well, I came to M. Co-Co-Co-lombat [our host], and from that time forth I've been entirely cur-cur-cur-ed!"

It now remains for us to consider the subject of punctuation, if we would complete our survey of reading as a material art.

CHAPTER VII.

PUNCTUATION.

WE punctuate with words as we punctuate with the pen.

A self-satisfied young man once went to M. Samson for lessons. Samson inquired, "You wish to take reading-lessons?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you in the habit of reading aloud?"

"Yes, sir; I have recited a great many scenes from Corneille and Molière."

"In public?"

"Yes, sir."

"Successfully?"

"Yes, sir."

"Please read the fable of 'The Oak and the Reed,' from this volume of La Fontaine."

The scholar began: "'The Oak one day, said to the Reed —'"

"That will do! Sir, you don't know how to read!"

"Certainly not, sir," replied the scholar, somewhat annoyed; "if I did, I should not come to you for advice. But I don't see how in a single line —"

"Please read it again."

He repeated: "'The Oak one day, said to the Reed —'"

"I said you didn't know how to read."

"But" —

"But," said Samson, calmly, "do we ever join adverbs to substantives, instead of to verbs? Was there ever an oak named 'One Day'? No; very well, then why do you read, 'The Oak one day, said to the Reed'? Say, 'The Oak (comma), one day said to the Reed.'"

"That's true!" cried the astonished youth.

"So true," replied his master, with the same quiet manner, "that I have just taught you one of the most important branches of the art of reading aloud, — the art of punctuation."

"What, sir, do people punctuate in reading?"

"Why, of course they do! Such and such a pause denotes a period; such and such a half-pause, a comma; such and such an accent, a question-mark: and much of the clearness and interest of

your story depends on this skilful distribution of periods and commas, which the reader indicates without mentioning, and the listener hears, although they are not expressly named."

Written punctuation varying in every age, spoken punctuation must also vary. Suppose that a tragic poet of our day should use Corneille's phrase, " Let him die ! " [1] he would put one, if not two, big exclamation-points after it. Corneille simply put a comma, which speaks loudly. It shows that to Corneille this line was no piece of noisy oratory, but an involuntary cry, instantly amended by the next line, which Voltaire thought weak because he could not feel its exquisite delicacy. The Roman exclaims, " Let him die ! " But the father adds, " Or let proud despair relieve him ! "

Ellipses, or stars (***), are a modern invention. There is not a solitary example of them in the literature of either the seventeenth or eighteenth century. They are much used in dramatic works, Scribe being one of their chief inventors. They suit the feverish, hurried action of his plays, being the punctuation

[1] From "Horace" (The Horatii). This line is world-renowned. Voltaire says that "there is nothing comparable to it in the literature of antiquity ; and that the whole audience was so carried away by it on its first hearing as to drown the *weak* line following it in storms of applause."

of a man in great haste, carried along by the rush of events, — the punctuation of a man who thinks that his meaning will be taken for granted. It is exceedingly hard to punctuate in this style, in reading.

It is now evident that I was right when I said that reading was an art, and had its special rules; for we have laid down rules for the production of the voice, for breathing, for pronunciation, articulation, and punctuation, — that is, for every thing relating to the material part of the art of reading. We will now advance to its intellectual side.

READING MADE ELOQUENT IN PROSE AND POETRY.

PART SECOND.

CHAPTER I.

READERS AND SPEAKERS.

Let us suppose a scholar who is mechanically perfect. Practice has made his voice even, agreeable, and flexible. He thoroughly understands the art of blending his medium, upper, and lower tones. He breathes imperceptibly. He pronounces distinctly. His articulation is sharp and clear. All faults in his pronunciation, — if he had any, — have been remedied. He punctuates as he reads. His delivery is neither hurried, jerky, nor drawling; and, what is very rare, he never drops his final syllables, so that every phrase is round and firm.

Is he a finished reader? No; he is only a correct reader. He can, without tiring himself or

his hearers, read a political report, a scientific speech, a financial statement, or a legal document. All this is very well; reading is thus brought to bear upon almost all the liberal professions, so that it may rightly be ranked under the head of useful knowledge.

But it does not yet deserve the noble name of *art*. To be worthy of that, it must extend to works of art; must become the interpreter of the master-pieces of genius: only, in that case, correctness will not suffice, — talent is also requisite.

All readers cannot become talented readers, neither can all learn with the same ease and in the same space of time; but all who are in any way gifted, may learn in proportion to their intellect and natural endowments. Select spirits, blessed with exceptional powers, will of course reap double harvest. Genius is not to be bought or taught, though talent may be acquired. When genius is added to talent, we call it Talma. Of what does this talent consist; upon what rules does it depend?

St. Marc Girardin, we remember, summed them up in the one axiom, "We should read as we speak." But this opinion, which has passed into a principle with many clever men, is subject to more than one restriction.

Read as we talk? So be it! — but on condition that we talk well. Now almost every one talks very ill. Add to this the fact that conversation admits, even requires, a certain amount of careless pronunciation, freedom of diction, and voluntary inaccuracy, which are graceful in their place, but which would certainly be a great defect in reading. To talk as we read would be pedantic; to read as we talk would often be vulgar.

An amateur who prided himself on his elegant elocution once went to the famous tragedian Lafon for lessons, less desirous of advice than of flattery from so high an authority. Lafon corrected his pronunciation frequently and severely, upon which the offended pupil exclaimed: "But, sir, I pronounce just as all fashionable people do."

"Fashion is fashion," replied Lafon, coldly, "but art is art; reading is reading, and its rules are not those of conversation."

The reproof was excellent; and the conclusion is that there undoubtedly is a truth of inflection, grace of diction, and naturalness in conversation which may be profitably employed in reading aloud; but that we must never borrow any but its good points, if we would be true to nature, and correct.

Nor is this all. People, by a strange confusion

of terms, use indifferently and in the same sense the two words *speak* and *talk*. No two words are more unlike in meaning. There are people who, from the standpoint of good diction, talk very well and speak quite as ill. If you wish to prove this fact, go into any court-house; address some lawyer of your acquaintance, and chat with him for a moment. His delivery will be natural and simple. Follow him into the court-room and listen to his plea. He is another man; all his merits disappear: he was natural, he is now bombastic; he talked in tune, he speaks out of tune, — for we can speak as well as sing out of tune. Many lawyers seem as if they were playing the part of L'Intimé in the "Plaideurs;"[1] Régnier, Got, and Coquelin imitate them so perfectly, that they seem rather to imitate Coquelin, Got, and Régnier. Everybody knows the lawyer whom Got copies; Coquelin imitates three; and as for Régnier, his model was a royal solicitor, who brought such poetic sweetness of pronunciation and such grace of delivery to bear upon his criminal cases, as to remind one of Mlle Mars in her palmy days, and to be perfectly irresistible.

We must not be too hard on lawyers; preachers

[1] Comedy by Racine.

are quite as bad. I have heard any number of preachers, and never but one who spoke thoroughly well. I will not name him, lest I quarrel with the rest. It is plain, that if we are to learn to read we should also learn to speak; and the curious point is that there is but one true way to learn to speak, and that is to learn to read. Let me explain my meaning.

A general mounts his horse before going into battle. His first requisite, therefore, is a knowledge of horsemanship. Obliged to move rapidly from one point to another, to see that his orders are properly executed, his animal should be the docile instrument of his will, which he can govern almost unconsciously: if obliged to pay attention to his steed, his mind cannot be upon his plan of action. A general, therefore, requires two instructors, — a warrior, and a riding-master.

Such is precisely the case with the speaker: his voice is his horse, his weapon of warfare; if he would not have it betray him in action, previous and direct practice must teach him the art of using it. We cannot learn to think and to speak at one and the same time. Vocal exercises and the study of delivery are all the more beneficial that they lead us to consider the ideas of others, and our own mind is free to examine them carefully.

I was once intimate with a young deputy, full of talent and learning, who deemed his deputyship merely a stepping-stone to the ministry. On one occasion, he was to deliver an address before the ministers and House of Deputies, and begged me to come and hear him. His speech over, he hurried towards me, anxious to learn my opinion.

"Well, old fellow," said I, "this speech will never get you into the Cabinet."

"Why not?"

"Because you absolutely don't know how to speak."

"Don't know how to speak!" said he, somewhat hurt and offended; "and yet I thought my speech —"

"Oh, your speech was in excellent taste, — fair and sensible, even witty; but what avails all that, if no one could hear you?"

"Not hear me! But I began so loud —"

"That you may say you shrieked; accordingly, you were hoarse in fifteen minutes."

"That's true."

"Wait; I haven't finished yet. Having spoken too loud, you spoke too fast."

"Oh! too fast!" he exclaimed, deprecatingly; "perhaps I did at the end, because I wanted to cut it short."

"Exactly; and you did the very opposite — you spun it out. Nothing, on the stage, makes a scene seem so long as to reel it off too fast. An audience is very cunning, and guesses by your very haste that you think the thing drags. Unwarned, the listener might not notice it; you draw his attention to the fact, and he loses patience."

"True again!" cried my friend. "I felt the audience slipping from me towards the end; but how can I remedy this ill?"

"Nothing easier. Take a reading-master."

"Do you know one?"

"A splendid one!"

"And who?"

"M. Samson."

"Samson, the actor?"

"Yes."

"But I can't take lessons of an actor."

"Why not?"

"Just think of it! A politician! a statesman! All the comic papers would make fun of me if it were known!"

"You are right! People are just stupid enough to turn you into ridicule for studying your profession. But rest easy, no one shall know it."

"You'll keep my secret?"

"Yes; and Samson too, I promise you."

So he set to work. Samson placed his voice, strengthened it, and made it flexible. He made him read aloud page after page of Bossuet, Massillon, and Bourdaloue; he taught him to begin a speech slowly and in a low voice: nothing so commands silence as a low voice; people are hushed to hear you, and end by listening. These wise lessons bore their fruit. Six months later, my friend was a minister! I don't say a great minister, but still a minister! I advise all to profit by his example Not that all can be ministers; but all may be obliged to speak two or three hours daily, whether as teachers, politicians, or lawyers. Be prepared! be well armed and equipped! Remember that no one can master his public unless he be master of himself; that no one can master himself unless he be master of his voice, and take an elocution-teacher! I am wrong, take two. If you would know any thing thoroughly, you should have a tutor as well as a teacher; and that tutor, yourself. Add personal observation to your lesson! Listen to voices as you study faces! Search for natural intonations as for sincere friends; and, above all, study children, for here comes in a very singular fact.

Children are admirable elocution-teachers. What

truth! what correct intonation! Their flexible organs yielding readily to their ever-changing emotions, they attain more daring inflections than the most skilful actor could imagine! Did you never hear a child repeat some secret which it has discovered, some mysterious scene it has witnessed, like Louisa in the "Malade Imaginaire"? It will imitate every voice, reproduce every accent! But ask the same child directly after, to read that very scene from Molière, and it will begin in the whining, nasal, and monotonous tone characteristic of juvenile reading. These great reading-masters cannot read. In proof of this strange phenomenon, let me cite an anecdote which throws much light on the question in hand.

In one of my plays, "Louise de Lignerolles," there is one character written for a child, which was originally given to a girl of ten, full of grace and intelligence. At the general rehearsal, my little actress did wonders; and a spectator, sitting in front of me, applauded her loudly, exclaiming, "What truth! what simplicity! it's very evident that she's never been taught to do that!"

Now, for a whole month, I had done nothing but teach her that part, intonation by intonation. Not that it was in any way beyond her childish capa-

city; for many of the expressions were borrowed from my little actress herself, I being in the habit of seeing her constantly. But so soon as these expressions were embodied in her part, so soon as she had to recite them, every trace of unconsciousness vanished. What she said to perfection when she spoke for herself, she uttered coldly and unmeaningly when she spoke for another; and it cost me much time and labor to bring her back to herself, to re-teach her what she had taught me.

It thus appears that reading is so deep an art, that it must be taught even to those who reveal it to us!

I now come to the most interesting point of our investigations, — reading considered as a means of literary appreciation.

CHAPTER II.

READING AS A MEANS OF CRITICISM.

After listening attentively to my thoughts and ideas on this subject, Sainte-Beuve said: "By your reckoning, then, a skilful reader is a skilful critic."

"To be sure," said I, "you are closer to the truth than you guessed; for in what, indeed, does the reader's talent lie, if not in rendering all the beauties of the works which he interprets? To render them properly, he must of course understand them. But the astonishing thing is, that it is his very effort to render them well which gives him a clearer comprehension of them. Reading aloud gives a power of analysis which silent reading can never know."

Sainte-Beuve then asked me to give him an example to illustrate my meaning; and I quoted Racine's famous speech on Corneille, which contains one passage specially remarkable, where he

draws a comparison between the French theatre before and after Corneille. I had often read this passage to myself, and admired it much ; but on attempting to read it aloud, I encountered difficulties which surprised me and gave me cause to reflect. The second part struck me as heavy, and almost impossible to render well. Composed of seventeen lines, it yet forms but a single phrase ! Not a breathing-place ! Not a period, colon, or even semicolon ! nothing but commas, with clause succeeding clause, prolonging the sense just as you deem it complete, and forcing you to follow it, panting for breath, through all its endless mazes ! I reached the end, gasping, but thoughtful. Why, I queried, did Racine write so long and labored a phrase ? Instinctively, my eye turned to the first part of the fragment. What did I see ? A perfect contrast ! Seven sentences in nine lines ! Exclamation-points everywhere ! Not a single verb ! A disjointed, jerky style ! All was fragmentary and broken ! I uttered a cry of joy ; light dawned upon me ! Desiring to express the two states of the drama, he did more than describe, he painted them in words To represent what he himself calls the chaotic stage of the dramatic poem, he employed a violent, abrupt, and inartistic style. To give a perfect picture of

dramatic art as Corneille made it, he imagined a long and well-turned period, harmonious and concordant, — similar, in fact, in its labored arrangement to Corneille's own tragedies, — "Rodogune" and "Polyeucte," — in the skilful combination of situations and characters.

This clew once gained, I took up the book, and re-read the fragment. Let any one read it accordingly, and judge for himself: —

"In what a wretched condition was the French stage when Corneille began his labors! What disorder! What irregularity! No taste, no knowledge of true dramatic beauty. Authors as ignorant as their audience, their themes for the most part extravagant and improbable, — no morals, no characters; the style of delivery even more vicious than the action, miserable puns and witticisms forming the chief ornament; in a word, every rule of art, and indeed of decency and propriety, violated.

"In this infancy, or rather this chaotic state, of the dramatic poem in France, Corneille, having long sought the right road, and struggled, if I may venture to say so, against the bad taste of his age, finally, inspired by rare genius and aided by his reading of antique literature, produced upon the

scene reason, but reason accompanied by all the pomp and splendor of which the French language is capable, brought the wonderful and the probable into happy harmony, and left far behind him all his rivals, most of whom, despairing of ever keeping pace with him, and fearing to dispute the prize with him, confined themselves to impugning the popular plaudits awarded him, and vainly strove, by their words and foolish criticisms, to depreciate a merit which they could not equal."

I think this proof decisive, this demonstration irrefutable. It is evident that the extract assumes an entirely novel aspect when read aloud. New light falls upon it, and the author's thought is made manifest. Shall I add that the very difficulty of reading this passage makes it an excellent lesson? I know nothing harder, and therefore more profitable, than to carry to a successful close this terrible seventeen-line-long sentence, without once stopping by the way, without seeming fatigued, always marking by your inflections that the sense is not complete, and finally unrolling the whole majestic phrase in all its amplitude and superb suppleness. My studies as a reader were very useful to me that day; and I inwardly thanked the art which, having

given me a true understanding of this fine fragment, allowed me to reveal it to others.

But every medal has its reverse; and reading aloud has its disillusions. If it teaches us to admire, it also teaches us to discriminate. Sainte-Beuve was right: a reader is a critic, a judge! — a judge to whom many hidden defects are revealed. How many sad discoveries I have made in this way! How many books and authors whom I admired, — whom others still admire, — failed to resist this terrible proof! We say that a thing stares us in the face: we may, with equal justice, say that it strikes our ear. The eye runs over the page, skips tedious bits, glides over dangerous spots! But the ear hears every thing! The ear makes no cuts! The ear is delicate, sensitive, and clairvoyant to a degree inconceivable by the eye. A word which, glanced at, passed unnoticed, assumes vast proportions when read aloud. A phrase which barely ruffled, now disgusts you. The greater the size of the audience, the more quick-sighted the reader becomes. An electric current is at once established between reader and audience, which becomes a means of mutual instruction. The reader teaches himself while teaching others. He needs not to be warned by their murmurs or signs

of impatience; their very silence speaks to him; he reads their thoughts, foresees that a certain passage will shock, must shock them, long before he reaches it: it seems as if his critical faculties, roused and set in motion by this formidable contact with the public, attained a certain power of divination!

CHAPTER III.

ON READING POETRY.

We now come to a most important point in our studies, — the application, namely, of our art to the reading of poetry. How should poetry be read? Judging by the present style, even on the stage, the great art of reading poetry lies in making people think it prose. I went to see a new play the other day, and, in a box close by me, were two elegantly dressed ladies. Suddenly, one said to the other, "But, my dear, this is poetry!" and thereupon both rose and left the theatre. Nor was it the actor's fault that they made this unpleasant discovery. He really did his best to disguise the monster, breaking, mouthing, and mincing his lines to his utmost ability.

Amateurs, of course, are even worse than professionals, and for a very simple reason. No one

can know what he has not learned, and very few suspect that there is any thing to be learned in this direction. Accordingly, I never hear poetry read in public without marvelling at the infinite variety of ways of reading it badly. Some, under pretext of harmony, feel obliged to wrap themselves in an unctuous sweetness, which rounds every angle, destroys all outlines, and finally produces an insipid, sickening sensation like that of some mucilaginous draught. Others, feigning to seek truth, let rhythm, rhyme, and reason go; and when they, by some unlucky chance, remember that the cæsural pause falls on the sixth foot, read boldly, —

> My spirit is not meet [pause, comma,] for speculation!"

To these strange errors let me oppose three absolute rules, whose truth I shall hope to exemplify: —

I. That the art of reading is never so difficult, nor so necessary, as when applied to poetry; and that long practice only can make one master of it.

II. That poetry should be read like poetry, and the poets interpreted by a poet.

III. That their interpreter becomes their confidant, and that they reveal to him secrets unknown to others.

A single man will suffice to prove these three propositions: I mean La Fontaine.

Here I must refer to a bit of detail, less a digression than a safer, pleasanter road towards our goal.

From La Fontaine's works I first learned to read. My master was a very clever man, almost too clever in point of fact. He had a charming voice which he used exceedingly well, an expressive face which he used to excess; and he gave me two kinds of lessons, both equally beneficial to me, and by which others may profit as well as I: he taught me what a reader should do, and what he should avoid doing.

On one occasion, when he was to read some of La Fontaine's fables at the Conservatory, — among them the "Oak and the Reed," — he invited me to come and hear him, saying: "You shall see how a reader who knows his trade presents himself before a large audience.

"I begin by glancing round the room; my look, all-embracing, and accompanied by a very slight smile, must be pleasant; its object is to collect the suffrages and sympathy of the audience in advance, and to fasten all eyes upon myself. I then make a little noise in my throat — hem! hem! — as if about to begin. But not at all, not yet! No! I wait for perfect silence to be established. I then extend

my arm, my right arm, curving my elbow grace fully, — the elbow is the soul of the arm! Interest and attention are excited: I give the title. I give it simply, without striving for effect, — I merely act the part of a play-bill. I then begin: '*The oak*,' — my voice full and round, gesture broad and somewhat bombastic! I desire to paint a giant, who stands with his head in the clouds and his feet in the kingdom of the dead.

> "'The Oak, one day, said to the Reed —'

"Oh! scarcely a morsel of voice for the word 'reed.' Make it as small as you can, poor leaflet; mark its insignificance by your tone; despise it thoroughly, look askance at it! All this very low and faint, — as if you saw it at a distance!"

You laugh! and you are quite right. And you will laugh still more, when I tell you that in the fable of "The Monkey and the Cat," at the lines —

> "One day, our two plunderers watched by the fire
> Rich, ripe nuts a-roasting, with looks of desire" —

M. Febvé rolled the *r's* to imitate the chestnuts crackling before the fire! Yes, all this is funny, is absurd! And yet, at bottom, it is correct, profound, and true. It is true that a reader should

never begin the instant he stands before his audience; true, that he should exchange communicating glances with his listeners; true, that he should give his title clearly and simply; true, finally, that he should represent and, as it were, paint his various characters by the varying tones of his voice,—and if we suppress the exaggeration and affectation resultant, we have an excellent and most useful lesson, especially in regard to La Fontaine. A general impression, now passed into a principle, declares that his fables are to be read simply. Certainly! but what do we mean by simply? Do we mean,—let us be plain,—do we mean prosily? If so, I say, No! a thousand times, No! That is not the way to read La Fontaine: that is disfiguring him. It is betraying, not translating, him. La Fontaine is the most complex of all French poets. No other poet unites in himself so many extremes. No poetry is so rich in oppositions. His nickname of good fellow, and his reputation for simplicity, deceive us. His character as a man leads us astray in regard to his character as a poet. Pen in hand, he is the most wily, ingenious, I may say the foxiest, of writers. With La Fontaine, every effect is calculated, premeditated, and worked for; and at the same time, by a marvellous faculty, every thing

is harmonious and natural. All is artistic ; nothing artificial. A line, a word, suffices to open vast horizons. He is an incomparable painter, unrivalled narrator. His character-drawing is almost equal to that of Molière himself. And can we suppose that all this may and can be rendered simply and straightforwardly? Heaven forbid! Deep study alone confers upon a reader the power of understanding and explaining even in imperfect fashion such profound art.

Take, for example, the fable of "The Heron:"[1]

> "One day, — no matter when or where, —
> A long-legged heron chanced to fare,
> With his long, sharp beak
> Helved on his long, lank neck."

Every one must feel the triple repetition of the word "long" to be a picturesque effect, which must be duly given by the reader.

> "He came to a river's brink, —
> The water was clear and still."

These two lines cannot be read in one and the same way ; the first, simply narrative in style, must be simply given. The second is descriptive: the

[1] Adapted from the translation by Elizur Wright.

image must be visible on the reader's lips, as on the writer's pen.

> "The carp and the pike there at will
> Pursued their silent fun,
> Turning up ever and anon
> A golden side to the sun!"

Oh! you don't know your trade as a reader if your gay, lively, sportive tone does not paint the antics of this frolicsome couple!

> "With ease the heron might have made
> Great profits in the fishing-trade:
> So near came the scaly fry
> They might be caught by the passer-by."

Simple narrative style.

> "But he thought he better might
> Wait for a smarter appetite."

Mark this! here we get an insight into the bird's character! The heron is a sensualist, an epicure, rather than a glutton. Appetite is a pleasure to those of dainty stomach. Give the word *appetite* that accent of satisfaction always roused by the thought or sight of any thing pleasant: we shall see directly how useful this slight hint will be.

> "For he lived by rule, and could not eat,
> Except at his hours, the best of meat."

Second descriptive verse. The heron is an important personage, and respects himself accordingly.

> "Anon his appetite returned once more.'

The heron is quite satisfied.

> "Approaching then again the shore,
> He saw some tench taking their leaps,
> Now and then, from the lowest deeps."

A perfect picture! an admirable stanza! It expresses that romantic feeling which all of us have experienced in fishing, when a fish rises slowly through the watery veil, faint and vague at first, but growing ever more distinct, until it leaps to the surface! Paint all this with your voice.!

> "With as dainty a taste as Horace's rat,
> He turned away from such food as that."

The character-drawing goes on.

> "What! tench for a heron? Poh!
> I scorn the thought, and let them go."

Mark the *h* in heron well; dwell on it,—make it as prominent as his own long legs.

> "The tench refused, there came a gudgeon,
> 'For all that,' said the bird, 'I trudge on.'"

Here he laughs a laugh of scorn!

"I 'll ne'er ope my beak, so the gods please,
For such mean little fishes as these.
He did it for less;
For it came to pass
That not another fish could he see;
And at last, so hungry was he," —

Hungry! Do you see the difference now between this and the word "appetite"? Do you think La Fontaine used this neat, sharp little phrase by mere chance? No longer an epicure, the very word is brief, pressing, and importunate as the want it expresses! Give all this with your voice, and also depict the sudden ending of the tale, scornful and summary as a decree of fate: —

"That he thought it of great avail
To find on the bank a single snail!"

Almost all La Fontaine's fables are susceptible of a similar amount of study; and all great poets demand as much research as La Fontaine. Only do not forget that there are as many ways of reading as of writing verse. Racine cannot be read like Corneille, Molière like Regnaud, nor Lamartine like Victor Hugo. To read is to translate. Our diction, therefore, to be good, should be an exact reflection of the genius that it interprets.

Diminish certain faults, disguise certain blemishes, hasten over tedious passages, but never be false to nature! A reader who applied the simple, natural style to "Ruy Blas," would at once deprive it of its most prominent quality, — richness of coloring. We must be extravagant with the extravagant. When we copy Rubens, we don't make a pencil drawing! So, too, every style of poetry has its own special manner, in which it should be read. If we read an ode like a fable, a lyric strain like a dramatic fragment, we instantly draw a dingy veil of uniformity over the superb variety of our literature. But the one invariable, fixed rule, applicable to every style and reader, — the rule which I repeat as the law of laws, — may be summed up in these words: *Poetry must be read poetically.* If it is rhythmical, give the rhythm; if it rhymes, give the rhyme. Some may bid you beware of exaggeration and bombast; to beware lest you forget nature: but, thank God! the truth is far beyond the petty comprehension of the pedant.

The next step in our progress leads us to consider the voice. A conversation which I recently held with Victor Cousin may serve to illustrate my views of the subject.

I had been criticising certain poems, and M.

Cousin, though agreeing with me, was surprised by my theories, and asked me how I came by such notions.

"By reading aloud," I replied. "The voice is a revealer, an initiator, whose power is as marvellous as it is unknown."

"I do not understand."

"Let me explain. Mme. Talma, a famous actress of the last century — "

"I've seen her!" cried Cousin. "What soul! What sensibility!"

"Well! Mme. Talma tells us in her memoirs that, when playing 'Andromache,' she was once so deeply moved that tears flowed, not only from the eyes of all her hearers, but from her own as well. The tragedy over, one of her admirers rushed to her box and, grasping her hand, exclaimed: 'Oh! my dear friend, it was wonderful! It was Andromache herself! I'm sure that you really felt yourself in Epirus, Hector's widow!'

"Not a bit of it!" she replied, with a laugh.

"And yet you were really affected, for you wept!"

"To be sure, I did."

"But why? why? What made you weep?"

"My voice."

"What! your voice?"

"Yes, my own voice! I was touched by the expression which my voice gave to the sorrows of Andromache, not by the sorrows themselves. The nervous shiver which traversed my frame was the electric shock produced on my nerves by my own tones. For the time being, I was both actress and audience. I magnetized myself!"

"How strange!" cried Cousin.

"And how much light the story throws upon the power of the voice! Nor was this feeling peculiar to Mme. Talma. Rachel once made a remark which I can never forget. She was speaking of having recited in the gardens at Potsdam before the czar of Russia, emperor of Germany, king of Prussia, and other crowned heads, and she said: 'That audience of kings electrified me. Never were my tones more omnipotent; *my voice bewitched my ears!*'

"Nor is this all. One of the greatest French actors now living has often told me that he could never reach the pitch of emotion which so deeply stirs his audience, if he did not learn his parts *by reciting them aloud.* His voice electrifies and guides him! And this is the explanation of the seemingly inexplicable fact that actors who are utterly stupid may appear brilliantly on the stage."

"Impossible!"

"I have known such instances! I have seen men of ordinary intellect and sensibility, on the stage, mould their hearers to their will, — and this because their voice knew, felt, and acted for them. Condemn them to silence, and they fall back into mediocrity. It seems as if a little fairy slumbered in their throat, who woke when they spoke, and by waving her wand, roused unknown powers in them. The voice is an invisible actor hidden within the actor, a mysterious reader concealed within the reader, — and serving both as prompter. I give you this problem to solve, my dear philosopher; but I draw from it this conclusion, which I hope you will grant, — that, inferior as I am to you in many respects, I do know La Fontaine better than you, simply because I read him aloud."

"So be it!" said my friend, smiling; "but who can say that you do not attribute intentions which they never had to La Fontaine and other great men?"

"I answer you by a quotation from Corneille. Some one once showed him certain obscure verses of his own composition, asking for an explanation. 'When I wrote them,' was his artless reply, 'I

understood them perfectly; but now they are as vague to me as to you.' You see that there are certain things in the works of the masters insoluble even by themselves. In the fire of creation, they instinctively use expressions which they do not realize, but which are none the less true. Genius, like beauty and childhood, is unconscious of self. When a child enchants us by his innocent smile, he does not know that it is innocent. Does this detract from its charm? One of the chief advantages of reading aloud is the fact that it reveals countless little shades of meaning in an author, ignored even by the hand that wrote them. In this way, the art might be used as a powerful educational instrument. A fine elocution-teacher is often an excellent teacher of literature."

Upon this we parted, M. Cousin uttering words which were very flattering, from such a source: "Thanks, my friend, you have taught me something new!"

CHAPTER IV.

A READING AT THE HOUSE OF A GREAT ACTRESS

I HAVE striven to describe some of the pleasures of the art of reading, and will now conclude with an account of an incident in which my poor skill as a reader did me good service.

"Adrienne Lecouvreur" was written for Mlle. Rachel, at her request, I might say her entreaty; but she spent the months which we used in writing, in wearying of the idea. Fickle by fancy, she was even more so through her lack of decision; she consulted every one, and every one influenced her. A critic's sneers sufficed to disgust her with the scheme which most enchanted her five minutes before. Such was the fate of "Adrienne." Her advisers alarmed her as to the result of this incursion of the dramatic realm. What! Hermione and Pauline consent to speak in prose? The daughter of Corneille and Racine stoop to become

the god-child of Scribe? The very thought was sacrilege!

On the day appointed for the reading, therefore, Rachel appeared, determined to refuse the character. The room was full; actresses, for they then enjoyed critical rights, mingled with the actors, and a certain air of solemnity pervading the assembly struck me as an evil omen on my entrance. Scribe took the manuscript and began to read; I ensconced myself in an arm-chair and watched. Then was unrolled before me a double drama, — our own, and that silently playing in the hearts of our audience. Vaguely aware of the secret purpose of their illustrious comrade, they felt themselves in a delicate position. A work written for Rachel, and refused by her, might prove the source of serious troubles, even legal contests, if accepted by the committee. The committee followed the reading of "Adrienne" on Rachel's face. That face being utterly impassive, so were theirs. During the five long acts she never smiled, she never applauded, nor in any way approved: neither did they. So complete was the general silence, that Scribe, fancying one of his hearers on the eve of slumber, interrupted his reading to say, "No ceremony, my dear fellow, I beg." The gentleman warmly pro-

tested; and this was the sole incident of the reading. Stay! I am wrong; there was another, or an attempt at one: in the fifth act, at the scene before the last, Rachel, involuntarily struck by the situation, leaned forward in her chair, in whose depths she had hitherto been buried, and listened as if deeply interested; but, seeing that I was looking at her, she instantly fell back and resumed her icy mask. The reading over, Scribe and I went into the manager's office, where he soon joined us, and told us with an expression of regret, which we accepted as sincere, that Rachel did not consider the part suited to her, and that, the work having been composed for her, the committee had concluded to consider the reading null and void. "In other words," said Scribe, "our play is rejected? Very well! Patient waiters are no losers." Next day, three different managers came for our play. Scribe longed for a speedy vengeance, and desired to accept one of these offers, but I absolutely refused. "My dear friend," said I, "the play was written for the Théâtre Français, — it must be played there. The part was written for Rachel, — she must play it."

"But how can we make her take it?"

"That I don't know. But do it, we must. During our labors, so large a share of which fell to you

you did me the honor to say that I understood the character of Adrienne better than you. And, indeed, I always felt the entire originality of the great actress, filled by the noble sentiments of the heroines she enacts, the interpreter of Corneille, in whose veins runs some portion of Corneille's spirit! Such a character can appear nowhere save on the stage of Corneille!" My tone of conviction conquered Scribe, though he was loath to yield. The managers renewed their offers and entreaties, one of them saying to tempt us: "My leading lady has never died on the stage, and she would be so glad of a chance to take poison!" But even this argument, powerful as it was, failed to persuade me; and six months elapsed without fresh results. Scribe then declared that he could wait no longer.

"Give me a week," was my reply. "You are going to Séricourt for a week, and if on your return I have gained nothing, I will surrender."

"So be it; I'll expect you to breakfast, a week from to-day, at eleven."

He set off, and I executed the following plan of action.[1]

[1] I am forced in this brief recital to speak much more of myself than of Scribe; but I should be very sorry to have any one attribute this to a desire on my part to claim the chief merit of our play: if our shares could be measured, his would certainly be the larger.

A new manager had lately been chosen at the Théâtre Français; to him I went, and said: "You know that Mlle. Rachel refused our play. I don't know whether this refusal was a mistake or not, but the form of it was certainly a great wrong to us. People don't return a piece of ordered work to a man like Scribe; they don't insult a genius of the foremost rank, and, permit me to say it, a young man who is not of the lowest. Rachel should be made to feel this and suffer for it; even talent like hers should pay some regard to the proprieties of life. Now, there is one way of reconciling every thing, — both her interests and ours. I ask her, not to play our piece, but to hear it; not at the theatre, in presence of her fellow-actors, but at her own house, before a few friends whom she shall choose: she may invite whom she likes, and I will come alone with my manuscript. If the work displease this new committee, I will accept their opinion as a righteous judgment. If it please them and her, she shall play it: she will make a great hit, and hail me as her savior." The offer was made and accepted, Rachel saying to a friend, "I can't refuse Legouvé, but I will never play that ——." The word was too expressive, too vulgar for print. An appointment was made for two days later, and the

judges chosen by the fair artist were Jules Janin, Merle, Rolle, and the manager of the Théâtre Français.

I was slightly agitated, no doubt, but master of myself; I was sure that I was right, and was well armed for battle. Scribe was a fine reader, and he read our play wonderfully well, save in one particular. To my mind, he did not sufficiently identify the part of Adrienne with Rachel; he read it with much grace, spirit, and warmth, but as one would read any young "leading lady's" part: it lacked grandeur; the heroine was not visible beneath the woman. Now, this was the very point by which I hoped to tame and accustom Rachel to this novel character. The task was both difficult and dangerous for her; therefore, the difficulties must be lessened, the dangers smoothed away; the reader's voice must point out to her, in advance, the gradation from one line of character to another, and convince her that what the public might regard as an utter metamorphosis, to her would be but a change of dress. This was the shade of meaning which I thought Scribe did not sufficiently mark, and which I had been studying for forty-eight hours.

I arrived, and was most agreeably received with

that caressing grace natural to Rachel. She herself mixed me a glass of sugar and water, brought me a chair, and even drew the curtains aside to give me better light! But I, who knew that famous phrase, "I'll never play that ——," I inwardly laughed at this excess of courtesy, especially as I guessed its purpose! For how could any one suspect ill-will or prejudice in a listener so graciously ready to hear?

I began. Throughout the first act, Rachel applauded, smiled, and in fact did just the contrary to what she did at the committee meeting. Why? oh! why? I easily guessed her motive; her plans were well laid. She wanted to give the excuse that the part did not suit her. Now, Adrienne not appearing in the first act, Rachel ran no risk in praising it; her very eulogies would give an impartial air to her subsequent reserve, and a flavor of sincerity to the regrets which would accompany her refusal. But her cunning was of no avail, for as soon as her friends saw these signs of satisfaction, they joined in them, — their hands became wonted to applause. The reader, cheered by their plaudits, grew animated; and I began the second act with my public well in hand, all sails set and driven forward by the breezes of success, — by that

electric current familiar to all dramatists, which suddenly runs around a hall when victory is secure.

In the second act, Adrienne appears, holding in her hand her part in "Bajazet," which she is studying. The Prince de Bouillon approaches, and asks gallantly, "What are you seeking now?" She replies: "Truth!" "Bravo!" cried Janin. Hullo! thought I, here 's a friend! for, after all, the phrase did not deserve a bravo. Rachel also turned to Janin, with a look that said: "Have we a traitor in the camp?" Luckily, the traitor's opinion soon became the general one. Rachel, surprised and somewhat embarrassed at her inability to remain impassive as before, yielded, after a faint resistance, to the universal feeling; and merely said, after the second act, which was warmly applauded: "Well, I always thought that the best act!" This was her last semblance of defence: in the third act, she boldly cast her former judgment to the winds, as certain politicians do their early opinions. She applauded, laughed, cried, and constantly exclaimed, "What a fool I was!" and at the close of the fifth act she fell upon my neck, embraced me heartily, and said, "How is it that you never turned actor?" The reader had saved the author! This pleased and flattered me much; for some time previous, on

hearing Guizot speak, she cried: "Oh! how I should like to play tragedy with that man!" Next day, at precisely eleven o'clock, I entered Scribe's apartment. "Well!" said he mockingly, "what have you accomplished?" My only answer was to pull a paper from my pocket and read aloud: "Théâtre Français, to-day at noon, rehearsal of 'Adrienne Lecouvreur.'"

He uttered an exclamation of surprise, and I told him the whole story. A month later, the curtain rose on the first performance. This month greatly enlightened me as to the mysteries and peculiarities of theatrical life, and I well remember one characteristic story. Shortly before the first performance of "Adrienne," there was no performance at the theatre on account of an evening rehearsal. Scribe, being detained at the opera-house by preparations for the "Prophet," did not come; the first four acts brought us to eleven o'clock. Most of the company went home, leaving Rachel, Régnier, Maillard, and myself alone. Rachel turned to me suddenly, saying: "Now we have the theatre to ourselves, let us try the fifth act, which we have never yet rehearsed! I ve been working at it alone for three days, and I want to see what I can do with it." There was neither gas nor foot-light; the only rays that fell

upon the stage came from the traditional lamp standing by the empty prompter's box; the only spectators were the fireman on duty slumbering in his chair between two side scenes, and myself in the orchestra. From the beginning, I was deeply affected by Rachel's tone; I never saw her so natural, so simple, so profoundly tragic; the reflections of the smoky lamp cast a frightfully livid hue over her face, and the empty hall echoed back her voice in weird reverberation: it was mournful in the extreme! The act over, we left the theatre. As we passed a mirror in the corridor, I was struck by my pallor, and even more so by that of Régnier and Maillard. As for Rachel, silent and aloof, shaken by a nervous tremor, she wiped away the tears still flowing from her eyes. I went to her, and, in lieu of any words of praise, showed her the agitated faces of her comrades; then taking her hand, said: —

"My dear friend, you played that fifth act as you never will again!"

"So I think," she replied; "and do you know why it was?"

"Yes; because there was no one to applaud you. You had no thought of effect; and thus you became, for the time being, to yourself, poor

Adrienne dying at midnight, in the arms of two faithful friends."

She was silent for a moment, then replied: —

"You are wrong! A miracle yet more strange was wrought within me: it was not for Adrienne I wept, it was for myself! Something, I know not what, suddenly told me that I should die young like her. I seemed to be in my own room, at my last hour, assisting at my own death; and when at the words, 'Farewell, dramatic triumphs! farewell, intoxicating blisses of an art that I have loved so fondly!' you saw me shed genuine tears, it was because I was thinking with anguish and despair that time would obliterate every lingering memory of my genius; and that soon — nothing would be left of her who was Rachel!"

Alas! she was right. A very few years later, she died like her sister Rebecca, and of the same fatal malady, at Cannet, a little village in Southern France. She was received with loving hospitality by one of Sardou's family, at a strange villa where the mystical fancy of the owner had accumulated and mingled in odd confusion images and symbols of various Oriental religions. On the day of her arrival, she was so exhausted by her journey that she went immediately to sleep. But waking at

midnight, she uttered a shriek of terror. The bed on which she lay was shaped like a tomb, and at the foot was a female figure leaning forward as if to seize her. It was a wood carving, intended to hold back the curtains. "Death! death!" she screamed, flinging herself from the bed. Her last days were passed in those alternations of hope and gloomy premonition peculiar to her disease. She often said: "I hope six hours of the day, and the rest of the time despair!" Her cruel sufferings were ever and anon sculpturesquely translated into the most graceful and beautiful of attitudes, — attitudes of which she was well aware; for never, amid the fiercest agony, whether mental or physical, does a great artist lose *self-consciousness:* he is an eternal spectacle unto himself; great as may be his despair, he watches it with argus eyes. Rachel felt her own elegance as she posed for a young invalid: she seemed to herself a beautiful statue of Grief!

Chance taking me to Cannet, I hastened to Sardou's home; she was unable to see me, but next day sent me a most grateful letter, concluding with these flattering words: "No one else writes female characters as you do; promise that you will write a play for my *re-appearance*." Three days later she was dead!

I feel sure of the pardon of my readers for yielding to the thronging memories which crowd upon me; but this brief digression to one of the greatest exemplars of the elocutionary art seems to me to merit a place in this study of elocution.

CHAPTER V.

CLOSING WORDS.

THIS sketch is dedicated to the pupils of the High and Normal School. Let me, in conclusion, recommend it to the masters, mistresses, and scholars of our primary schools.

Written for the elect of the University, it may be doubted whether my book is adapted to the more modest representatives of the science of education.

Let others judge of this.

Some days since, at the invitation of a superintendent of girls' schools, I visited a primary and a normal school in a quarter of Paris by no means poor. I was asked to hear the children and future teachers read ; and, on doing so, two things chiefly struck me in the children, — namely, their weak voices and their absolute lack of punctuation. They read as if their vocal chords had no strength, and their sentences neither periods nor commas.

This was not the result of natural weakness of the organs of speech; for, when they answered questions put to them, their tones instantly became round and clear. It was due to timidity, caused by inexperience, ignorance, and bad habits. They had absolutely no idea how to manage their voices.

In the young teachers of the future, I found the qualities of correctness and grace of diction; but the mechanical and technical part of the art of reading was entirely wanting. Their very skilful teacher can afford them but too slight a portion of his time.

And is it a matter of indifference that the masters, mistresses, and pupils of primary schools remain in this crass ignorance?

Let others, again, be judges.

The head-teacher of the Normal School tells me that of twenty girls who leave her to teach primary schools, two or three return to her every year, with such severe throat-troubles that they are obliged to give up their profession.

There is, therefore, no one to whom the art of reading is more necessary, — since learning to read also includes learning to breathe, to punctuate, to spare one's strength; and since vocal exercises are

the most wholesome of gymnastics. To strengthen the voice is to strengthen the whole system ; to strengthen the voice is not only to develop vocal power, but also the power of lungs and larynx, as the following anecdote may prove. Previous to 1848, M. Fortoul was chosen professor of a provincial college. He hesitated to accept, the morbid delicacy of his throat making him dread the fatigue of teaching. "Accept," said his doctor ; "public speaking in a large hall will strengthen your throat, provided you learn to speak properly first." He accepted, studied, strove, succeeded ; and at the end of the year found himself four thousand francs richer and a well man.

What is true of the technical part of reading is also true of its intellectual part. What a new and powerful means of good might be exerted by any one who would gradually initiate the lower and rural classes, by reading aloud to them, into an even imperfect knowledge of the beauties of literature ! Is not a lesson in a nation's genius a lesson in its history as well ? Is it not a moral duty to rivet and multiply in every way the bonds uniting the people to their country's intellectual glory ? Have not the people hearts, minds, and imaginations ? And, without quitting the field of education, what

more potent aid can a scholar have than reading? Memory is one of the greatest instruments of instruction, and reading aloud teaches the pupil the best use of this instrument. Does not a child learn a thousand times faster, and remember much longer, if, instead of laboring to hammer words and phrases into his mind by dint of mere mechanical repetition, he absorbs them by his reason and feeling, — that is, by his comprehension of the meaning and beauty of a work? Nothing is more conducive to learning a thing by rote than to understand and admire it.

In the name, then, of physical and mental well-being, I demand that the art of reading aloud shall be ranked among the principal branches of public education in France as well as in America! I claim for the people, first, a thorough course of instruction in reading in our normal schools; second, a prize for reading in our primary schools. There is no true progress in education save that which begins in childhood and with the people; and in a democracy, all being done *by* all, all should be done *for* all!